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ABSTRACT

In this lesson plan, students are assigned a member of the California Assembly to research and a political faction to represent. Students examine representative bills voted on by the California Assembly to determine if their member's voting record coincides with the views of their political faction. Ultimately, students must decide whether, and how, to target their Assembly member as friend or foe. Students are provided with background information, detailed instructions, and online resources. The teacher's notes describe the unit's purpose, explain the application of history/social science standards, suggest teaching strategies, and provide sample political faction descriptions, a representation of the political spectrum, a voting record worksheet, and an activity questionnaire. (BT)

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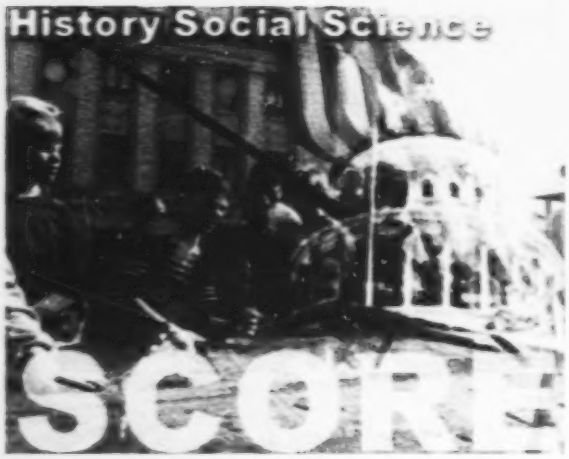

Schools of California Online Resources for Education (SCORE): Connecting California's Classrooms to the World

SELECT A LAWMAKER

12th Grade Lesson by Ed Cabrera

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http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/activity/lawmaker/

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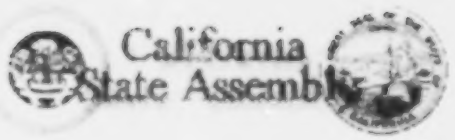

http://www.assembly.ca.gov/acs/defaulttext.asp

Select-a-Lawmaker

Attention All Party Analysts:

We will win in 2000! With an organized effort our party will be successful in accomplishing our agenda. California has waited too long!

As our party's legislative analyst and lobbyist, it is your job to help our party faction recruit the votes it needs in the Assembly to further our legislative aims. You will be helping us by researching the voting record of an individual member of the Assembly. We will compare their voting patterns with the objectives of our party.

Based on your findings, we will devise a strategy to most efficiently utilize our time and resources. We will devote the majority of our money and time to support those candidates who have voted in alignment with our objectives.

You are responsible for making a final recommendation to our party. Did the candidate you researched vote during the last term in a manner consistent with our objectives? Should we back him/her with our resources?

Chair, Political Action

Party Central Committee

Task

By computer draw, you will be assigned a member of the California Assembly and a political party or party faction. A political faction is a group of people within a political party with a common purpose or ideology. Based on the aims of our faction, you will examine a representative number of bills voted on by the Assembly last year. The bills will deal with a broad spectrum of causes and concerns. In addition to a summary of the bills, you will receive the voting results on each bill.

First, you must find out if your candidate has a similar view of government as we do. To begin with, you need to place our political faction on the political spectrum. Then you should exercise your knowledge of your Assembly representative by identifying as accurately as possible his/her position on the political spectrum. Lastly, you must compare the respective positions of your representative and our faction on the spectrum. Decide if you believe our faction should back the representative with its resources.

Procedure

- Find out the name of the Assembly representative you will be researching from the Political Action Chair (your teacher).
- Analyze the Sample Party Faction Description sheet or an example distributed by the Political Action Chair. The faction sheet has clues as to how a group would vote on an issue.
- Review copies of four recently passed bills of the California Assembly.
- Obtain a copy of the Political Spectrum Chart from the Political Action Chair. Analyze each bill to identify the opposing viewpoints. Locate the corresponding places of each viewpoint on the political spectrum.
- Using the Internet, download the voting results on the bills distributed. Complete the Voter Worksheet. The grid will allow you to "grade" your assigned representative on your faction's aims.
- Reviewing the Voter Worksheet notes you have made, write a paragraph arguing for your party faction to give or withhold support for the Assembly representative you researched.
- Finally, you and your classmates will hold a "draft" where you will have the opportunity to report your decisions on the individual legislators. Your collective task will be to match each faction's aims with the most appropriate legislator. You may do this by simply declaring your intent to "draft" the legislator in written form with your reasons for your decision. You may call on the worksheets of the other students for their support statements. The same legislator may be selected by more than one faction. You will also be asked to support your decisions with a rationale.

Resources

Official California Legislative Information
http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html

Silicon Valley Public Access Link

http://www.svpal.org/cgi-bin/gopher2html/govt/CA_Leg

California Senate and Assembly Bills

http://www.assembly.ca.gov/acs/acsframeset2text.htm

Learning Advice

Refer to the straight line political spectrum provided. This spectrum will give you a clearer graphic representation of where on the spectrum your representatives will land. Carefully examine the Sample Party Faction Description Sheet and seek clarification from your Political Action Chair, if needed, before analyzing the bills.

Evaluation

The majority of your evaluation and feedback will come as a result of an assessment of your scorecard. The legislator's "grade" will not be as important as the rationale that you give for the grade.

Additionally, your oral presentation at the "Draft" must be clear and persuasive.

Conclusion

At the concluding "Draft" involving the pool of legislators, you will receive a final opportunity to identify your rationale for grading your individual legislator. In addition, you will be able to match the needs of your organization with the voting records of all the legislators.

Use this guide to inform your understanding of the news. Follow the activities of the California Assembly in the newspaper and bring further examples of actions or votes these legislators have taken based on their positions on issues discussed in class.

Reflection

Complete the Concluding Questionnaire evaluating the Select-a-Legislator activity.

Think about the importance of knowing how your legislators vote and making informed decisions about which politicians for whom you will vote.

Teacher Notes

Grade Level and Unit:

12th grade political science

H/SS Standards:

12.7 Students analyze and compare the powers and procedures of the national, state, tribal, and local governments, in terms of:

2. the major responsibilities and sources of revenue for state and local governments

5. how public policy is formed, including the setting of the public agenda and how it is carried out through regulations and executive orders

6. the process of lawmaking at each of the three levels of government, including the role of lobbying and the media

Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills:

Historical Research, Evidence and Point of View

2. students identify bias and prejudice in historical interpretations

3. students evaluate major debates among historians concerning alternative interpretations of the past, including an analysis of authors' use of evidence and the distinctions between sound generalizations and misleading oversimplifications

Lesson Length:

4 hours (may be shortened by providing students with fewer bills)

Lesson Purpose:

This lesson guides students to:

- explore the process of lawmaking as affected by special interest groups
- understand the range of perspectives within political parties
- gain experience in oral presentation
- gain experience in reading and using primary documents such as legislative bills
- explore various social and political differences in the population that are important to political outcomes.

Needed Prerequisite Teaching:

This lesson should be preceded by an exercise to familiarize students with the political spectrum and where different factions would be placed.

Teacher Shortcuts:

Using a computer grading program like "Making the Grade" will make the pairing of students to legislator easier. Use the "Select-a-Student" feature of the program to choose students. Any manual system may substituted if the program is not available.

Providing one bill per student at the beginning of the lesson is ideal. If you wish to prolong the exercise, more bills may be assigned.

The Sample Party Faction Descriptions is only a guide. Create your own faction description to take into account political issues of importance at the time your class completes this lesson. It will be helpful to follow the format given. Follow this explanation of the lesson plan. These faction sheets provide important clues as to how a group would vote on an issue.

Extra Materials Needed:

- preprinted voter worksheets
- handouts of legislator backgrounds
- faction descriptions

- political spectrum handout
- student questionnaire

It is recommended that teachers add points to the final grade for completion of the questionnaire as motivation for a sincere effort.

Credits:

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Sample Party Faction Descriptions

Party Faction: The EcoRagers

Your party has come onto the political scene with a great impact of late. Your place is on the left side of the political spectrum because you espouse liberal attitudes towards the protection of the environment. You have little confidence in people in general and business in particular when it comes to doing the right thing with regards to protecting our natural resources. You, therefore, depend largely on the government to enact and enforce legislation to provide the protection you feel the environment needs. You are willing to foot the bill, if necessary, with higher taxes. You also realize that, unfortunately, jobs may be lost in some industries such as the timber business due to moves made to support your stance. In looking at the big picture, you maintain that such setbacks are minor in comparison to salvaging our world for future generations. You are looking for lawmakers with the courage to see your side of the argument over the environment.

Party Faction: The Crusaders

You feel that the deterioration of the American family is the biggest problem in America today. The failure to allow prayer in schools, the popularity of pro-choice forces, the increase of one parent families and the sad state of our entertainment industry are but just a few of the reasons that you cite as causing the downfall of our society. You may find your location on the spectrum on the conservative right. While you maintain that the individual's right to make the important moral decisions for his family is sacred you would also like government's support in this area by upholding our traditions. You, for example, would oppose same sex marriages and would not want to see benefits given to unmarried couples.

POLITICAL SPECTRUM

* A RADICAL BELIEVES IN RAPID CHANGE AND SUPPORTS EXTREME SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS. THEY MAY BE FOUND ON EITHER SIDE OF THE SPECTRUM

VOTER WORKSHEET

Bill Number	Bill Title	Explanation	Vote	Spectrum Place	Faction Stand

Selection Rationale

Give reasons as to why you have decided to give or withhold the support of your faction from this particular candidate.

Concluding Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to help improve this class activity in the future.

1. Were the instructions in the activity clear?

2. Were the objectives of the lesson clear?

3. Did you feel you had the proper information and background to complete your assignment?

4. What was the most helpful information that you gathered in this activity?

5. How would you improve this activity?

6. Was sufficient time given to complete the assignment?

7. Any additional comments?